

Napoleon Bonaparte

- Napoleon Bonaparte was a military general who became the first emperor of France. His drive for military expansion changed the world.
- Napoleon Bonaparte was born on August 15, 1769, in Ajaccio, Corsica, France. He died on May 5, 1821, on the island of St. Helena in the South Atlantic Ocean.
- Napoleon ended up at the military college of Brienne, where he studied for five years, before moving on to the military academy in Paris. He graduated early and returned home.
- Later Napoleon returned to France meant a return to service with the French military. Upon rejoining his regiment at Nice in June 1793, the young leader quickly showed his support for the Jacobins, a far-left political movement and the most well-known and popular political club from the French Revolution.
- It had certainly been a tumultuous few years for France and its citizens. The country was declared a republic in 1792, three years after the Revolution had begun, and the following year King Louis XVI was executed.
- Ultimately, these acts led to the rise of Maximilien de Robespierre and what became, essentially, the dictatorship of the Committee of Public Safety. The years of 1793 and 1794 came to be known as the Reign of Terror, in which many as 40,000 people were killed.
 - Eventually the Jacobins fell from power and Robespierre was executed.
- In 1795 the Directory took control of the country, a power it would assume until 1799.
- All of this turmoil created opportunities for ambitious military leaders like Napoleon. He was soon named commander of the Army of the Interior. In addition, he was a trusted advisor to the Directory on military matters.
- In 1796, Napoleon took the helm of the Army of Italy, a post he had been coveting. The army, just 30,000 strong, disgruntled and underfed, was soon turned around by the young military commander.
- Under his direction the rebuilt army won numerous crucial victories against the Austrians, greatly expanded the French empire and helped make Napoleon the military's brightest star.
- After squashing an internal threat by the royalists, who wished to return France to a monarchy, Napoleon was on the move again, this time to the Middle East to undermine Great Britain's empire by occupying Egypt and disrupting English trade routes to India.
- On August 1, 1798, Admiral Horatio Nelson's fleet decimated his forces in the Battle of the Nile. Napoleon's image was greatly harmed by the loss, and in a show of newfound confidence against the commander, Britain, Austria, Russia and Turkey formed a new coalition against France. In the spring of 1799, French armies were defeated in Italy, forcing France to give up much of the peninsula.
- Inside France itself, unrest continued to ensue, and in June of 1799, a coup resulted in the Jacobins taking control of the Directory.
- In October, Napoleon returned to France. Working with one of the new directors, Emmanuel Sieyès, he hatched plans for a second coup that would place the two men, and another, Pierre-Roger Ducos, atop a new government, called the *Consulate*. Napoleon's great political skills soon led to a new constitution that created the position of first consul, which amounted to nothing less than a dictatorship.
- Under his direction Napoleon turned his reforms to other areas of the country, including its economy, legal system and education, and even the Church, as he reinstated Roman Catholicism as the state religion.
- He also instituted the Napoleonic Code, which forbade privileges based on birth, allowed freedom of religion and stated that government jobs must be given to the most qualified. Internationally, he negotiated a European peace.
- In 1802 he was elected consul for life, and two years later he was proclaimed emperor of France.
- Napoleon greatly expanded the French empire, paving the way for loyalists to his government to be installed in Holland, Italy, Naples, Sweden, Spain and Westphalia.
- Napoleon's military success, however, soon gave way to broader defeats, beginning in 1810, when France suffered a string of losses that tapped the country's military budget.
- In 1812, France was devastated when its invasion of Russia turned out to be a colossal failure in which scores of soldiers in Napoleon's Grand Army were killed or badly wounded. Out of an original fighting force of some 600,000 men, just 10,000 soldiers were still fit for battle.
- News of the defeat reinvigorated Napoleon's enemies, both inside and outside of France. A failed coup was attempted while Napoleon led his charge against Russia, while the British began to advance through French territories.
- With international pressure mounting and his government lacking the resources to fight back against his enemies, Napoleon surrendered to allied forces on March 30, 1814. He went into exile on the island of Elba.